



Effective parenting Proverbs

(Week 5)

This study is more like a workshop, and you will need to plan to spend most of the meeting doing this, and spend less time praying or having supper. Try to allocate 1-1/2 hours.

Although it would best suit those who have their own children, it should be of interest to anyone who regularly relates with children e.g. teachers, uncles, aunts, godparents and babysitters.

Sheets of paper and pens or pencils will be needed.

Reflective exercise (25 mins):

Divide an A4 sheet of paper into three (by drawing two lines across the page).

In the top third of the paper, write down the dreams, aspirations and hopes you had for parenthood before you became a mum or dad. How did you imagine you would be, and how did you picture your future relationships with your kids?

In the middle third describe what it has really been like (include your joys as well as your disappointments). Focus on each of your children as you do this.

In the bottom third write down what you would like to do differently in the coming year, with each of your children (we're *not* focusing on how you would like your *kids* to be different. This is about *you*. What changes can you make, with the support of God and his people?)

Share your answers (as much or as little as you choose to) in pairs.

Ephesians 6:4, with some help from Proverbs (5 mins):

Background:

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds God's people that they are saved/rescued by God's grace. His forgiveness is a free gift, paid for us by Jesus (2:8-9).

He also issues a challenge to godly, Spirit-filled living (2:10, 5:18).

How we parent our children is an important aspect of living by the Spirit.

Paul addresses dads, for God has entrusted them with a particular responsibility for loving, responsible leadership in the home. Of course mums would do well to follow the same principles.

In this study we are focusing on Ephesians 6:4, but read aloud vs 1-4, to put vs 4 into context.

(Notice that there is a DO NOT and a DO here.)

DO NOT (15 mins):

1. What are parents not to do (vs 4)?
2. From your experience, what sorts of things exasperate your children (or provoke them to bitterness)?

What exasperated you as a child?

The embittering behaviors you discussed probably lie between two extremes.

*On extreme is **abandonment**. This happens when we are not present for our children, either physically or emotionally.*

*The other extreme is **bullying**.*

Abuse of our power as parents can take various forms: eg name-calling and labeling, showing overt favoritism, physical or emotional punishment that is over the top or unfair, and constant criticism (so that our children grow up believing that nothing they do is ever good enough [and they consequently find it hard to trust in God's grace]).

It also includes the terrible specter of sexual abuse, which is an abuse of power, and extremely selfish.

DO (20 mins):

All the words Paul uses here are important.

3. What are parents to do (vs 4)?

Notice that one important aspect of raising our children is “disciplinary correction” (the same word is used in Heb 12:4-11 to describe God’s discipline of us.

4. Read Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:17.

Do we have to literally *beat* our children to apply the principles of these passages?

Which is worse... to be too tough, or not tough enough, with our kids?

5. What kind of “instruction” have dads been given a special responsibility to impart (6:4)?

Is Paul talking about the way we instruct or what we instruct?

How important is this instruction/training (see Proverbs 22:6)?

In practice, who is the primary instructor-in-the-Lord for your own children?

Please conclude this workshop by taking turns to read (and reflect on) the suggestions over the page.

Three practical suggestions (20 mins):

It is never too late to start. Experiment with doing one of them in the coming week.

1. **Learn to talk:**

Practice sharing yourself with your children. Most of us love to hear stories about people. So do our kids. Most of all, they love to hear our life stories, as well as our current concerns, ideas and experiences.

And just as we hate being interrogated, so do our children. We are more likely to get them to share with us if we share our lives with them, rather than grill them.

Learn to talk. Not just superficially. Make yourself more vulnerable with your children!

2. **Learn to listen:**

Most of us have heard of "active listening"... but still don't do it very well. We're practiced at giving advice, making judgments, and using other peoples' stories as springboards for our own.

Active listening means listening in a way that conveys understanding and acceptance. More often than not our kids don't need us to tell them what to do. Once they "get things off their chests" they can usually figure things out for themselves. The best way to "get something off our chests" is to be heard, understood and accepted by someone important to us.

If you're rusty in this area, do a refresher course in active listening, preferably with your kids so they can keep you accountable!

3. **Practice affirmation and hugs:**

"I really liked it when you ..."

"One of the things I really appreciate about you is ..."

"N (say their name), I love you!"

Even occasional comments like these fill up our children's emotional tanks.

Finally:

Later, at home, have another look at the sheet you began with. Revise what you will do differently this year.

A workshop like this can leave us feeling quite guilty and inadequate. What could be more guilt-inducing than being a parent!

The Bible's answer to failure is to "repent and believe the good news about Jesus Christ."

Repentance is more than just feeling sorry or remorseful. It is a real willingness to receive God's forgiveness through Jesus, and to be changed, with God's help... using whatever resources he makes available to us (including professional counselors).